

THE CLEVELAND
MUSEUM OF ART
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October 10, 1991

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THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION
MASAHISA FUKASE: THE SOLITUDE OF RAVENS
October 25-January 5, 1991, Photography Gallery 105

The work of Japanese photographer Masahisa Fukase is featured in an exhibition at The Cleveland Museum of Art, *Masahisa Fukase: The Solitude of Ravens*. Though his photography has been a major influence in his home country since his first exhibition there in 1960, Fukase has rarely exhibited in the United States. In addition to numerous group and individual shows in his native country, he has published nine books of photographs in Japan and the United States. An important body of his recent work has focused on a single subject: ravens.

The 20 striking images in this exhibition study that bird's dark form. In some photographs the raven might be alone in a mist; in others, flocks of the birds cross the sky or settle on trees and buildings. Eyes often glint eerily as single points of light against black heads. Sometimes we see only a blur of dark feathers, and one frame shows just a few three-pronged footprints as evidence of a raven's having once lighted there in the snow. The often coarse-grained black-and-white prints emphasize the stark economy of the photographer's compositions, each frame incorporating but a few simple elements. The sense of vague foreboding with which the bird is associated, seen through Fukase's melancholy expressive vision, makes for a more disturbing aesthetic experience than the vivid 16th-century works in the Museum's 75th anniversary exhibition, *The Triumph of Japanese Style* (October 19 - December 1, 1991), but the reduction of forms to their simplest symbolic essences goes directly back to age-old Japanese artistic traditions.

Fukase describes his approach as drawing on both imagination and technical skill: "I try to return to the origins of photography...when it was necessary to possess intuition, sensitivity, and dexterity." Those fundamentals, applied through Fukase's eyes to this single subject, result in a mysterious, memorable group of images. The exhibition, on loan from Asian photography specialist Ruth Silverman of San Francisco, was organized by Tom Hinson, curator of contemporary art.

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